

VZCZCXRO7934  
RR RUEHHM  
DE RUEHHI #1187 2910925  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 170925Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8630  
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 5227

UNCLAS HANOI 001187

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: A LESSON IN DOUBLE-SPEAK - HANOI AUTHORITIES BRIEF FOREIGN  
MISSIONS ON CATHOLIC LAND CLAIMS

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On October 15, the Chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee Nguyen The Thao summoned senior diplomats to provide the official version of events surrounding the Catholic Church land claims at Thai Ha parish and the former residence of the Papal Nuncio. After a long, technical explanation of the historical and legal background to the disputed properties, Hanoi officials excoriated Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet for causing "social disorder and public discontent." Thao's deputy confirmed that the GVN had asked Vietnam's Episcopal Council to transfer Archbishop Kiet and others out of Hanoi. The briefing did not sit well with many in the audience -- subsequent glowing press reports to the contrary -- and the Charge and other diplomats voiced concern over the authorities' handling of the whole affair. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) On October 15, the Hanoi People's Committee invited Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs of Mission to attend a briefing on recent events concerning disputed property at the Thai Ha parish and the former residence of the Papal Nuncio. People's Committee Chairman Nguyen The Thao was joined by Vice Chairman Vu Hong Khanh, Police Chief Nguyen Duc Nhanh, and representatives of the MFA and Government's Committee for Religious Affairs. A number of representatives of Vietnam's state-controlled media also attended.

3. (SBU) Opening the briefing, Vice Chairman Vu Hong Khanh launched into a complicated discussion of the historical and legal background of the properties, insisting that the two parcels once belonged to the Catholic Church, but were voluntarily transferred to the State in the 1960s during the land reform movement. "Many plots of land were transferred to State management during and after the War as they hadn't been well utilized," Khanh stressed, adding that the Church's land claims were not in compliance with the spirit/content of the current land Law and Resolution 23 of the National Assembly.

4. (SBU) According to Khanh, the city's administration many times invited the priests in charge of the Hanoi Archbishop's Residence and Thai Ha Parish to discuss the issues and had proposed giving the Church other land. However, instead of sitting down with city authorities, clergymen including Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet and Thai Ha chief priest Vu Khoi Phung had organized demonstrations and sit-ins. (Note: The Archbishop told us in September the Church had written annually for seven years to inquire about its claims, but never received a response. Khanh's story omitted the Church's objection to the transfer of the land to a developer proposing to bid a Karaoke club. End note.) Moreover, according to Khanh, local Church leaders, including the Archbishop, had "excited ignorant parishioners in and outside Hanoi to commit unlawful acts." As evidence, Khanh cited the destruction of a gate at Thai Ha, the installation of statutes and crosses, and the posting of fabricated information on the internet. Because of these efforts to arouse "social disorders and public discontent," the city administration decided to take back the land and build parks there for public use.

5. (SBU) Vice Chairman Khanh stated that the city administration had issued an official warning against Archbishop Ngo Quang Kiet, Thai Ha Church chief priest Vu Khoi Phung, and other clergymen.

They had also asked the Episcopal Council to transfer Archbishop Kiet out of Hanoi. In response to pointed questioning from the diplomats, Khanh said while the city administration respects freedom of expression and religion, religious practice must be in accordance to the law. The Catholic Church's efforts to reclaim land was wrong, and the recent acts of a number of clergymen and parishioners violated the law, Khanh said.

16. (SBU) The Charge questioned why the authorities felt it necessary to transfer Archbishop Kiet and others out of Hanoi, emphasizing that it was difficult to explain these actions to a skeptical U.S. audience. The Charge urged to allow freedom of expression and find a mechanism to resolve disputes such as these reasonably, fairly, and within the law.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The briefing was surreal enough. But the next day the newspaper "New Hanoi" offered the following Orwellian account: "[The Charge] appreciated the way the People's Committee handled the matter. She said: 'We have always informed our government and people in our country that those are purely complaints for land, they have nothing to do with limiting religious freedom and freedom of speech.' [She] expressed her hope that Hanoi would effectively handle similar cases in the future." No further comment needed.